

A LETTER from a Merchant in Bristol, touching the Trade to Africa, as it relates to the Out-ports of Great Britain.

TH E late Petition of the *African Company*, and their Pretences for an Exclusive Trade, have very much alarm'd the City of *Bristol*, as it needs must all the rest of the trading Sea-Ports of *Great Britain*; and, if ever granted, must unavoidably ruin the Plantation-Trade, wherein almost all the Navigation of the Out-ports is chiefly employ'd.

But the Pretences of your *African Company* for such their unreasonable Demands, you say, are, that Forts are necessary to Trade, and that the Trade to *Africa* cannot be carried on without them.

But how can that Argument hold good? Doth not the Coast of *Africa* reach 2000 and odd Leagues? and have the Company Forts within Gun-shot of each other in that large Tract of Land? Or are not their Forts situated (all but *Gambia*) on the *Gold-Coast*, which reaches but 50 Leagues; and our Traders affirm, that even on that Coast they trade out at Sea, on the Faith of the Natives, at great Distance from those Forts, who bring Gold, Negroes, &c. from above and below them many Miles?

If Forts are useful to Trade, why did not the *French* keep that of *Gambia* and *Serraleon*, when they had them? Or why were they so ill kept by the Company, as to be taken by open Boats?

Would not two Ships of War be a much better Protection to the Trade, than Forts without Garrisons, Generals without Soldiers, Guns without Carriages, and Factors without Goods or Honesty, and but kept just in a Condition to obstruct the Trade of the 10 per Cent. Ships?

Is not *Wida* a Neutral Port, where all Ships trade, without molesting one another, under Protection of the King, and all their Cargoes put into the Custody of the Natives, being carried up nine Miles within Land to the King's Town: Where is the Want of a Fort here?

Pray what Forts have the *Portuguese* and *Dutch* Interlopers on the *Gold Coast*? and yet the former carry off great Numbers of Slaves; the latter almost all the Gold on the Coast, trading out at Sea entirely on the Faith of the Natives.

But then, If they are of no Use in Trade, what Use are they of? Why truly they must be kept by us, or else the *Dutch* will get into them, and plague you, they say, as bad as the Company have done; so that they are but a Plague to Traders at best: And 'tis much the same thing, I think, to the 10 per Cent. Traders, whether the *Dutch* or the *African Company* obstruct their Trade; which is the Use they are like to be of, unless the Government can be perswaded to take Care of them, or they be put under the Management of a Regulated Company.

But they argue, you say, that Alliances are necessary in Trade. What Alliances are made in the other 1950 Leagues of the Coast of *Africa*, where the *Dutch* Interlopers, the *Portuguese*, and *English* Separate Traders, carry on a greater Trade far than on the *Gold Coast*? 'Tis fair Dealing with the Natives, and Justice; and not Alliances with one King, to make War on another, that is the Foundation of all Commerce in the World.

What is meant by the Company's Complaint of Dearness of Negroes on the Coast? Are they not purchas'd with the Woollen and other Manufactures of this Kingdom? and the more we give, if we can afford it, the more Hands are employ'd, and the more Work expended in the making them; and are not those Goods both worse in Quality, and lower in Price than ever.

But 500 l. Value in Goods now, will buy as many Negroes as formerly, I am well assured; and if any Difference of Price of Negroes in the Plantations, that must wholly be ascribed to the Accidents of the present War; by the Difference of Freight and Assurance, Delay of Convoys and Captures, not incident in Peace. But suppose 30 Shillings worth of Goods might be sav'd in the Price of each Negro, could that enable the Company to sell Negroes at 16 l. per Head, as is pretended; when every one, according to their Management, must stand them in this War at least double that Sum? And do not the Separate Traders, by means of a Glut, often sell many Ships Loads of Negroes, at from 12 l. to 16 l. per Head in Peace in the Plantations; and in Exchange for Sugar had but one Hogshead of Sugar for a Negro; whereas the Company, when Exclusive, in Peace, usually had 6 or 7 Hogsheads of Sugar for such Negro.

And have not the Plantations been well and cheaply supply'd with Negroes even this War; so that the Number for this last Year's Supply, for *Jamaica* only, would have amounted to near 11000 and odd Negroes (abating the Accidents of War) and the usual Price at *Jamaica*, *Virginia*, and *Maryland*, have been mostly this War, at from 18 l. to 25 l. per Head. And was not *Barbados* supplied with 4 or 5000 Negroes a Year before the Paper-Money was imposed there? And the *Leeward Islands* well supplied too, before the *French* took some of them, and left the Inhabitants neither Goods or Money to buy Negroes with.

Whence come the Quantities of Silver and Gold in the Men of War now expected from *Jamaica*? Doth it not mostly proceed from the Sale of Negroes, carry'd by private Traders to the *Spaniards*?

But if this Trade is to be lock'd up, what must become of the Out-ports of *Great Britain*, who have little or no Trade left, but that to the Plantations, which encreases or diminishes in Proportion to the Numbers of Negroes imported there, which produce the Commodities with which our Ships are usually loaded, and enables the Planters to live well, and purchase great Quantities of our *British* Commodities.

Is not our City of *Bristol*, and all other Out-ports of *Great Britain*, already excluded from the Trade of one large Part of the World, of all *Asia*, by means of Companies; nay, and excluded even from going thro' the *Magellan Straights* to *Lima*, to fetch Gold and Silver (till open'd by Act of Parliament last Year) so that the *French* have wholly enjoy'd the Benefit of that Trade all this War, without Interruption; while *Great Britain* hath been shut out.

An Exclusive Trade to *Africa*, wherein we employ 12 or 14 Ships a Year, is not the only Mischief in this Case; but must be follow'd by the Loss of all our Freight-Trade from the Plantations, wherein are employed most of the Ships of the Out-ports of *Great Britain*, because all Returns made for Negroes must unavoidably be brought to *London*, where this Company is intended to be fixed; whereby we shall at once be deprived of the Trade of *Africa* and *America* also, and only a Part of *Europe* left us to trade to.

Are not we of the Out-ports Fellow-Subjects of Great Britain? Where are our Liberties? Is not Freedom of Trade the greatest and most desirable Part of Freedom? And are not Monopolies the greatest Badges of Slavery, which in the worst of Times were soonest redres'd of all Grievances?

But who are they that endeavour at this Monopoly? the present African Company; whose Bonds go a-begging at 10s. in the Pound; whose Predecessors broke twice before, which hath been the Fate of most of the Companies in Europe. Did not the short-liv'd Portuguese Cochao Company break in 4 Years after their Establishment? Have not the Dutch failed? And what Condition are the Brandenburgh and French Companies in at present?

Must the industrious Citizens of Bristol give Place to your Bankrupt, Stock jobbing Companies? Must we and our Children come to London, to be their Book-Keepers, Servants or Footmen? Or must we remove to foreign Countries, where we may carry on our Trades with Freedom?

What improves your Lands, and raises your Rents about London, but the Improvement of Trade and Manufactures? But must none but your Lands have any Share in that Happiness, and enjoy the Trade of the whole World? while we of the Out-ports are allowed less than one Quarter of it. And what Effects must North Britain have of the late Union? Would they not quickly see the hoped-for Benefit thereof vanish into Smoke?

What hath made Liverpool lately flourish so much, but the Improvement of the Plantation-Trade by the increase of the Numbers of Negroes carried thither by Separate Traders, which in Peace will be the Case of many other Towns, especially of North-Britain?

Suppose the Gentlemen of Britain were confined to buy all their Horses by Contract of one Person or Company, exclusive of all others, at a certain Price; what must be the Consequence? Why, one should have a lame Horse, one a blind Horse, another should have a Horse worth the Money, according to the Interest to be made with the Seller; and sometimes they should have none at all neither, which was the exact Case of the Plantations under this African Company, when exclusive to all others, in respect to their Supply of Negro-Servants.

But can you find no Remedy to cure this lame Leg? These Forts which serve the African Company to beg with, cannot you maintain them (if thought worth while) in a regulated manner, in a Company like that to Russia or Turkey? Or cannot our Government be perswaded to take care of them as the Portuguese do theirs?

Where can be the Difficulty? If the Money rais'd in 10 Years past by the Ten per Cent. Duty appears (as you say) much more than sufficient to that purpose, tho' three Men had been kept where the Company kept one, provided their 4 Generals had been left out.

But what mean the clamorous Purchasers of the Company's Bonds, in desiring an exclusive African Trade? Must the Trade of our City, and the rest of the Out-ports be ruined, that they may gain Cent. per Cent. Profit on the said Bonds, which they vainly hop'd will be paid if they are restored?

You say the Company in their Papers term the Act of Parliament for laying open the Trade to Africa, an Experiment; but the Increase of the Trade shews it one of the best that ever was made: And you must give me leave now to end my Letter, with giving you an Account of an Experiment on the other hand, of an exclusive Company erected in the Year 1693. to trade to Greenland, which tho' likely to be one of the most beneficial Trades of Great Britain, yet came thereby to be wholly lost to this Nation, without Redemption (by reason the Persons skilled in that Trade were forced to settle in other Countries for want of Employment at home) and never could be recovered since. The Substance of the Act for repealing that Company is as follows.

Anno Primo, Anna Regna, Cap. 16.

Whereas by an Act, &c. for encouraging the Greenland-Fishery, a Company was incorporated exclusive to the rest of her Majesty's Subjects, &c. N.

Notwithstanding which the said Company have of late wholly neglected and lost that Trade to this Nation; and therefore for the enlarging and encouraging the Greenland-Trade: And for the better Improvement of the same for the good of England, it shall be lawful for any of her Majesty's Subjects whatever, that shall adventure to Greenland for fishing Whales, to have and enjoy all the Privileges that were granted to the said Companz by the aforesaid Act.

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